

Glossary of Planning Terms

Acoustical Engineer. An engineer specializing in the measurement and physical properties of sound. In environmental review, the acoustical engineer measures noise impacts of proposed projects and designs measures to reduce those impacts.

Acoustics. The physical qualities of a room or other enclosure (such as size, shape, amount of noise) that determine the audibility and perception of speech and music.

Acre, Gross. Area of a site calculated to the centerline of bounding streets and other public rights-of-way.

Acre, Net. The portion of a site that can actually be built upon. Not included in the net acreage of a site are public or private road rights-of-way, public open space, and flood ways.

Ambient Conditions. Initial background concentration sensed/measured at a monitoring/sampling site, as in air quality or noise.

Aquifer. A natural underground formation that is saturated with water, and from which water can be withdrawn.

Arterial. A vehicular right-of-way whose primary function is to carry through traffic in a continuous route across an urban area while also providing some access to abutting land.

Attainment Area. An area considered to have air quality as good as or better than federal or state air quality standards as defined in the federal Clean Air Act or the California Clean Air Act. An area may be an attainment area for one pollutant and a non-attainment area for others.

Average Daily Traffic (ADT). The number of vehicles passing a given point on a road going in a direction during a 24-hour period.

Bike Lane. A corridor expressly reserved by markings for bicycles, existing on a street or roadway in addition to any lanes for use by motorized vehicles.

Bike Path. A paved route not on a street or roadway, expressly reserved for bicycles. Bike paths may parallel roads but typically are separated from them by landscaping.

Buildout. That level of urban development characterized by full occupancy of all developable sites in accordance with the General Plan; the maximum probable level of development envisioned by the General Plan under specified assumptions about densities and intensities. Buildout does not assume that each parcel is developed to maximum permitted floor area or housing units.

Caltrans. California Department of Transportation.

Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The multi-year scheduling of public physical improvements based on studies of fiscal resources available and the choice of specific improvements to be constructed.

Carbon Monoxide (CO). A colorless, odorless gas, formed by the incomplete combustion of fuels, which is toxic because of its tendency to reduce the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood.

CMP. Congestion Management Program, Santa Clara County

Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL). A 24-hour energy equivalent level derived from a variety of single-noise events, with weighting factors of 5 and 10 dB applied to the evening (7:00 to 10:00 p.m.) and nighttime (10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.) periods, respectively, to allow for the greater sensitivity to noise during those hours. An alternative measure is day-night average sound level (L_{dn}), the A-weighted average sound level for a given area (measured in decibels) during a 24-hour period with a 10 dB weighting applied to nighttime sound levels. The L_{dn} is approximately numerically equal to the CNEL for most environmental settings.

Culvert. A drain, ditch or conduit not incorporated in a closed system that carries drainage water under a driveway, roadway, railroad, pedestrian walk or public way. Culverts are often built to channelize streams and as part of flood control systems.

Curb Cut. The opening along the curb line at which point vehicles or other wheeled forms of transportation may enter or leave the roadway. Curb cuts are essential at street corners for wheelchair users.

Day-Night Average Sound Level (L_{dn}). The A-weighted average sound level in decibels during a 24-hour period with a 10 dB weighing applied to nighttime sound levels (10 p.m. to 7 a.m.). This exposure method is similar to the CNEL, but deletes the evening time period (7 p.m. to 10 p.m.) as a separate factor.

Decibel "A-Weighted" (dBA). The scale for measuring sound in decibels that weights or reduces the effects of low and high frequencies in order to simulate human hearing. See also Decibel.

Decibel (dB). A unit used to express the relative intensity of a sound as it is heard by the human ear. The decibel measuring scale is logarithmic. Zero (0 dB) on the scale is the lowest sound level that a normal ear can detect under very quiet ("laboratory") conditions and is referred to as the "threshold" of human hearing. On the logarithmic scale, 10 decibels are 10 times more intense, 20 decibels are 100 times more intense, and 30 decibels are 1,000 times more intense than 1 decibel. See also Decibel "A-Weighted."

Density, Gross. The number of dwelling units per gross acre of developable residential land designated on the General Plan Diagram.

Design Capacity. The capacity at which a street, water distribution pipe, pump or reservoir, or a wastewater pipe or treatment plant is intended to operate.

Development Fees. Direct charges or dedications collected on a one-time basis for a service provided or as a condition of approval being granted by the local government.

Endangered Species, California. A native species or sub-species of a bird, mammal, fish, amphibian, reptile, or plant, which is in serious danger of becoming extinct throughout all or a significant portion of its range, due to one or more factors, including loss in habitat, change in habitat, over-exploitation, predation, competition, or disease. The status is determined by the state Department of Fish and Game together with the state Fish and Game Commission.

Endangered Species, Federal. A species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range, other than the species of the Class Insecta determined to constitute a pest whose protection under the provisions of the 1973 Endangered Species Act, as amended, would present an overwhelming and overriding risk to humans. The status is determined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of the Interior.

Environment. The physical conditions which exist within the area which will be affected by a proposed project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historical or aesthetic significance. The area involved shall be the area in which significant effects would occur either directly or indirectly as a result of the project. The "environment" includes both natural and man-made conditions.

EPA. Environmental Protection Agency.

Equivalent Noise Level (Leq). A single-number representation of the fluctuating sound level in decibels over a specified period of time. It is a sound-energy average of the fluctuating level.

Erosion. The process by which material is removed from the earth's surface (including weathering, dissolution, abrasion, and transportation), most commonly by wind or water.

Fault. A fracture in the earth's crust forming a boundary between rock masses that have shifted. An active fault is a fault that has moved recently and which is likely to again. An inactive fault is a fault which shows no evidence of movement in recent geologic time and no potential for movement in the relatively near future.

Federal Candidate Species, Category 1 (Candidate 1). Species for which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has sufficient biological information to support a proposal to list as Endangered or Threatened.

Federal Candidate Species, Category 2 (Candidate 2). Species for which existing information indicates that these species may warrant listing, but for which substantial biological information to support a proposed rule is lacking.

Federal Flood Insurance. Affordable flood insurance offered by the federal government to property owners whose communities participate in the National Flood Insurance Program.

FEMA. Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Floor Area, Gross. The total horizontal area in square feet of all floors within the exterior walls of a building, but not including the area of unroofed inner courts or shaft enclosures.

FIRM. Flood Insurance Rate Map.

Floor Area Ratio (FAR). The ratio between gross floor area of structures on a site and gross site area. Thus, a two-story building covering 50 percent of its site would have a FAR of 1.0.

Groundwater. Water under the earth's surface, often confined to aquifers capable of supplying wells and springs.

Habitat. The natural environment of a plant or animal.

Hazardous Material. A material or form of energy that could cause injury or illness to persons, livestock, or the natural environment.

Hazardous Waste. Waste which requires special handling to avoid illness or injury to persons or damage to property. Includes, but is not limited to, inorganic mineral acids of sulfur, fluorine, chlorine, nitrogen, chromium, phosphorous, selenium and arsenic and their common salts; lead, nickel, and mercury and their inorganic salts or metallo-organic derivatives; coal, tar acids such as phenol and cresols and their salts; and all radioactive materials.

Household. Person or persons living in one dwelling unit.

Housing Unit, Single-Family Detached. Single family units that are detached from any other house with open space on all four sides.

Housing Unit, Single-Family Attached. Single family units that are attached to other units with adjoining walls extending from ground to roof that separate it from other adjoining structures and form a property line. Each unit has its own heating system.

Housing Unit, Multi-family. Units with two or more housing units in one structure.

Indirect Source. Any structure or installation which attracts an activity which creates emissions of pollutants. For example, a major employment center, a shopping center, an airport, or a stadium can all be considered to be indirect sources.

Infill. The development of new housing or other buildings on scattered vacant lots in a built-up area or on new building parcels created by permitted lot splits.

Infrastructure. Permanent utility installations, including roads, water supply lines, sewage collection pipes, and power and communications lines.

Intersection Capacity. The maximum number of vehicles that has a reasonable expectation of passing through an intersection in one direction during a given time period under prevailing roadway and traffic conditions.

Jobs-Housing Balance. The jobs/housing ratio divides the number of jobs in an area by the number of employed residents. A ratio of 1.0 typically indicates a balance. A ratio greater than 1.0 indicates a net in-commute; less than 1.0 indicates a net out-commute.

Landslide. The downslope movement of soil and rock.

Land Use. The purpose or activity for which a piece of land or its buildings is designed, arranged, or intended, or for which it is occupied or maintained.

Level of Service (LOS). The different operating conditions which occur in a lane or roadway when accommodating various traffic volumes. A qualitative measure of the effect of traffic flow factors such as special travel time, interruptions, freedom to maneuver, driver comfort, and convenience, and indirectly, safety and operating cost. Levels of service are usually described by a letter rating system of A through F, with LOS A indicating stable traffic flow with little or no delays and LOS F indicating excessive delays and jammed traffic conditions.

Liquefaction. A sudden large decrease in the shearing resistance of a cohesionless soil, caused by a collapse of the structure by shock or strain, and associated with a sudden but temporary increase of the pore fluid pressure.

Maximum Credible Earthquake. The largest Richter magnitude (M) seismic event that appears to be reasonably capable of occurring under the conditions of the presently known geological framework.

Mitigation Measure. Action taken to reduce or eliminate environmental impacts. Mitigation includes: avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action; minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation; rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment; reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance during the life of the action; and compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

Mobile Home. A structure, transportable in one or more sections which is built on a permanent chassis and designed to be used as a dwelling unit, with or without a permanent foundation when connected to the required utilities.

Mobile Sources. A source of air pollution that is related to transportation vehicles, such as automobiles or buses.

Noise Contour(s). Isolines (a line on a map or chart along which there is a constant value) representing noise, measured in decibels. See also Community Noise Equivalent Level.

Non-point Source. A pollutant source introduced from dispersed points and lacking a single, identifiable origin. Examples include automobile emissions or urban run-off.

NPDES. National Pollution Discharge Elimination System.

100-Year Flood. That flood event which has a one percent chance of occurrence in any one year.

Open Space. Any parcel or area of land or water which is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open-space use as defined in the General Plan or designated on a local, regional, or state open-space plan as one of the four types of open space defined by state planning law.

Ozone. A compound consisting of three oxygen atoms, that is the primary constituent of smog. It is formed through chemical reactions in the atmosphere involving volatile organic compounds, nitrogen oxides, and sunlight. Ozone can initiate damage to the lungs as well as damage to trees, crops, and materials. There is a natural layer of ozone in the upper atmosphere which shields the earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation.

PM-10. The current standard for measuring the amount of solid or liquid matter suspended in the atmosphere ("particulate matter including dust"). Refers to the amount of particulate matter over 10 micrometers in diameter. The smaller PM-10 particles penetrate to the deeper portions of the lung, affecting sensitive population groups such as children and people with respiratory diseases.

Peak Hour Traffic. The number of vehicles passing over a designated section of a street during the busiest one-hour period during a 24-hour period.

Percent Slope. A common way of expressing the steepness of the slope of terrain, which is derived by dividing the change in elevation by the horizontal distance traversed. An increase of 20 feet elevation over a 100 foot distance is a 20 percent slope.

Planning Area. The City and the land outside its boundaries that bear relation to its planning.

Point Source. A source of pollutants which may be traced to a discrete point of emission.

Precursor. A chemical compound that leads to the formation of a pollutant. Reactive organic gases and nitrogen oxides are precursors of photochemical oxidants.

Rare Species. A condition in which a species or subspecies, although not currently threatened with extinction, exists in such small numbers throughout its range that it may be endangered if the quality of its environment worsens.

Response Time. The amount of time for an emergency services response, measured from the time of the distress call until arrival on the scene.

Richter Scale. A logarithmic scale developed in 1935/36 by Dr. Charles F. Richter and Dr. Beno Gutenberg to measure earthquake magnitude by the amount of energy released, as opposed to earthquake intensity as determined by local effects on people, structures, and earth materials.

Right-of-Way. A strip of land acquired by reservation, dedication, forced dedication, prescription or condemnation, and intended to be occupied or actually occupied by a road, crosswalk, railroad, electric transmission lines, oil or gas pipeline, water line, sanitary storm sewer or other similar use.

Riparian. Pertaining to the bank of a natural course of water, whether seasonal or annual. Riparian habitat is defined by the surrounding vegetation or presence of known wildlife movement pathways; it borders or surrounds a waterway.

Sedimentation. Process by which material suspended in water is deposited in a body of water.

SMARA. California Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975.

Solid Waste. Unwanted or discarded material, including garbage, with insufficient liquid content to be free flowing.

Source Separation. A process in which solid waste materials are produced as an autonomous waste product which are stored separately at the site of generation, or are physically separated from all other solid wastes into recyclable, compostable, or other fractions at the site of generation.

Sphere of Influence (SOI). The ultimate service area of the City of Milpitas as established by Santa Clara County LAFCO.

Stationary Source. A source of air pollution that is not mobile, such as a heating plant or an exhaust stack from a laboratory.

Subdivision. The division of a lot, tract, or parcel of land into two or more lots, tracts, parcels, or other divisions of land for sale, development, or lease.

Threatened Species, California. A species of animal or plant is endangered when its survival and reproduction in the wild are in immediate jeopardy from one or more causes, including loss of habitat, change in habitat, over-exploitation, predation, competition, disease, or other factors; or when although not presently threatened with extinction, the species exists in such small numbers that it may become endangered if its environment worsens. A species of animal or plant shall be presumed to be rare or endangered as it is listed in: Sections 670.2 or 670.5, Title 14, California Code of Regulations; or Title 50, Code of Federal Regulations Sections 17.11 or 17.12 pursuant to the Federal Endangered Species Act as rare, threatened, or endangered.

Threatened Species, Federal. A species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Trip Generation. The number of vehicle trip ends associated with (i.e., produced by) a particular land use or traffic study site. A trip end is defined as a single vehicle movement. Roundtrips consist of two trip ends.

Transportation Systems Management (TSM). Measures designed to reduce peak-period auto traffic by making a more efficient use of existing resources, and emphasizing transit, ridesharing, and non-automobile alternatives.

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). A measure of both the volume and extent of motor vehicle operation; the total number of vehicle miles travelled within a specified geographical area (whether the entire country or a smaller area) over a given period of time.

Volume-to-Capacity Ratio (V/C). In reference to public services or transportation, ratio of peak hour use to capacity.

Waste Stream. All solid, semi-solid and liquid wastes including garbage, refuse, paper, rubbish, ashes, industrial wastes, demolition and construction wastes, abandoned vehicles and parts thereof, discarded home and industrial appliances, manure, vegetable or animal solid and semisolid wastes, and other paper, rubbish, ashes, industrial wastes, demolition and construction wastes, abandoned vehicles and parts thereof, discarded home and industrial appliances, manure, vegetable or animal solid and semisolid wastes, and other discarded solid and semisolid wastes.

Wetlands. An area at least periodically wet or flooded; where the water table stands at or above the land surface (bogs and marshes). Also those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas.

Wildlife Corridors. A natural corridor, such as an undeveloped ravine, that is frequently used by wildlife to travel from one area to another.

Xeric. Vegetation requiring only a small amount of moisture.

Zoning District. A specifically delineated area on a zoning map within which regulations and requirements uniformly govern the use, placement, spacing, and size of buildings, open spaces, and other facilities.

Zoning Ordinance. The City ordinance which divides Milpitas into districts and establishes regulations governing the use, placement, spacing, and size of buildings, open spaces, and other facilities.